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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MEXICO 000518

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MX](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: CALDERON VISITS JUAREZ, ANNOUNCES NEW STRATEGY

11. (SBU) Summary: The January 31 murder of fifteen people in Ciudad Juarez, most of whom were students with no known criminal ties, captured the nation's attention and prompted increased government engagement in the city from the federal and state governments to restore security in the city. Most importantly, in response to the Salvarcar massacre, President Calderon hastened the announcement of a new Juarez strategy, which the GOM has been developing with US Mission support. The new approach will not only increase GOM's commitment to improving the capacity of law enforcement and judicial institutions in Ciudad Juarez, but will also invest in the necessary socio-economic interventions for Juarez residents to resist criminal organizations in the long-term. Calderon's announcement is consistent with the needs identified during our assessment visit to Ciudad Juarez-El Paso and months of bilateral engagement. End Summary

Juarez Massacre Sparks Public Outrage, GOM Response

12. (SBU) The January 31 murder of fifteen people, mostly high school and university students, in a private home in the working class Ciudad Juarez neighborhood of Villas de Salvarcar has captured the nation's attention and convinced the GOM to move quickly to revise its strategy to reduce violence in the city. The attack, carried out by members of the Juarez Cartel, ignited an outpouring of anger against state and federal authorities for not preventing the death of so many youth, whom law enforcement authorities say were innocent. January was the most violent month in Mexico since Calderon initiated his war against organized crime, with well over 900 narcotics-related homicides, 240 of which took place in Juarez.

13. (SBU) The attack hastened the Calderon government's announcement of an evolving security strategy in Juarez and has created an unprecedented level of engagement by every level of government to address the violence in Juarez. In his February 11 visit to Juarez, President Calderon presented the GOM's estimated USD 230 million proposed action plan for Juarez, which focused on four key themes: 1) Strengthening rule of law; 2) Building civilian police and investigative forces, including enhanced intelligence capacity; 2) Socio-economic development, including investments in education, health, and job creation; and 4) Civil society participation. He unveiled the plan in a public forum to leaders from the city's political, economic and social sectors, and received credit for assuming partial responsibility for what he called the "city's dire security situation and breakdown of social capital." Further, he recognized that federal authorities need to better coordinate actions with state and municipal governments and overcome political

differences if the plan is to succeed. He apologized for his initial handling of the homicides - while in Tokyo, the President publicly suggested that the victims were likely involved in illicit activities - and also announced he will return to Juarez next week to receive feedback from the community on the proposal.

14. (SBU) Calderon's announcement marked a shift toward a new programmatic focus in Ciudad Juarez that will include socio-economic development and community involvement to support law enforcement's efforts to reduce violence. Notably, Secretary for Education Alonso Lujambio and Secretary for Social Development Heriberto Felix Guerra accompanied Calderon on the presidium, along with the usual security players. Calderon's delegation also represented a rare joint appearance by members of his National Security Cabinet and Economic and Development Cabinet. Members of Calderon's security team told the Ambassador that his delegation was expanded at the last moment - a possible sign of his commitment to Juarez and his effort to make a strong showing of federal force there.

State Government, Opponents, Offer Their Take

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15. (SBU) Calderon's advance team was at work in Juarez on the new strategy since at least the January 31 massacre, but pressure from the Chihuahua State government and other political opponents hastened the unveiling of the plan. Chihuahua Governor Jose Reyes Baeza Terrazas had also received heavy public criticism after the Salvarcar attack, and when President Calderon announced during his February 1-2 trip to Japan his plan to integrate jobs, education and drug treatment programs into his government's security package for Juarez, Baeza accused the federal government of cutting the state out of the program's planning process. (Note: That claim is disingenuous. Baeza participated in a number of planning sessions with federal agencies, including one with the Ambassador.) During a visit to the Salvarcar site on February 3, Baeza emphasized that any federal programming in Juarez must be coordinated with the state and local governments, and complained that he had received no information about the kinds of programs the GOM is considering for the city. Baeza's visit to Salvarcar coincided with a national security cabinet meeting in Mexico City to discuss the federal government's strategy for Ciudad Juarez, to which the governor claimed he was not invited.

16. (SBU) Baeza's frustrations were compounded by recent polls showing that Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) gubernatorial candidate Cesar Duarte's lead in the poll numbers over National Action Party (PAN) rival Carlos Borruel had narrowed over the past month from 40 to 20 percent in advance of state elections election in July. By the time Calderon arrived in Juarez on February 11, however, tensions between the federal and state governments were reduced. Much of the credit for this could be attributed to the intervening visit of Secretary of Government Fernando Gomez Mont. During his visit on February 8, Gomez Mont visited the Salvarcar massacre site and stressed the federal government's commitment to working with state and local authorities on the new security and development program.

17. (SBU) The massacre and its aftershocks reverberated in Mexico City, as well, and Calderon's PRI and Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) opponents accused the President of pursuing a failed policy. Even members of his own PAN asked that the GOM's security approach be revised in light of continued violence throughout the country, and in Juarez particularly. Immediately following the incident, the Senate called for the Secretaries of Public Security, Defense, Navy, Government, and the Attorney General to testify - the closed hearing is scheduled for February 16 and will be in front of only twelve select senators.

18. (SBU) Meanwhile, in a move that took the GOM by surprise, Governor Baeza also announced on February 6 his intention to transfer state executive, legislative and judicial functions from Chihuahua City to Ciudad Juarez for an indefinite period of time. Baeza said that the move was to "ensure that the federal government implements its social programming plan for Juarez in a manner consistent with the city's needs." Public opinion polls and Consulate conversations with local politicians, civil society, and the private sector suggested that Juarez residents were skeptical the proposed transfer of powers would have any impact on the security situation, and in a February 12 vote the state legislature's PAN bloc abstained; a measure to move the state congress's functions to Juarez fell two votes short of the two-thirds super-majority required. Still, the governor's office says that Baeza intends to spend several days each week in Juarez. [Note: As has commonly been the case in the past, Juarez Mayor Jose Reyes Ferriz has been a non-factor in the aftermath of the Salvarcar tragedy and the subsequent disputes between the federal and state governments. If Governor Baeza and Agriculture Reform Secretary Abelardo Escobar Prieto take up at least part-time residence in Juarez (as promised by Calderon) to manage the new programs, their presence could represent the kind of hands-on governance that the city has lacked for some time.]

Comment

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19. (SBU) Ciudad Juarez has become emblematic of Mexico, shaping the political debate domestically and perceptions of the country internationally. The January 31 Salvarcar massacre - while a new low for the city - has prompted a previously unseen level of attention by federal and state governments to resuscitate Ciudad Juarez, with both Calderon and Baeza accepting ownership and responsibility for both the city's ills and providing the remedies. Additionally, the GOM's new Juarez strategy is a sign that the Calderon government and Chihuahua state counterparts have taken on what we have learned from months of bilateral engagement on this topic - that the development of more effective judicial and security institutions, as well as social and community side solutions will create the institutions and opportunities necessary for long-term success in the counternarcotics fight that an exclusive focus on the capture of high-value targets will not.

10. (SBU) One of Calderon's key challenges is to channel the public's new engagement - and anger - in Juarez and around the country in a constructive way. A poll conducted by Ulises Beltran and Associates following the Juarez massacre indicates that, while 67 percent of respondents support Calderon's counternarcotics strategy, 60 percent still see the President as not having control of the country. The GOM can address the public's growing weariness by demonstrating results from a strategy that is broader than arrests and raids and offers instead real citizen security on the ground. This will not be easy, and the issues of impunity, lack of accountability, and the need for real law and order are all critical components that must be addressed in addition to development and economic issues. Moreover, we should fully expect security issues - and Juarez in particular - to be increasingly politicized as the country moves toward state elections this summer and presidential elections in 2012. Nevertheless, the USG is well-placed to support efforts to implement new and creative strategies, starting with the February 22 bilateral planning session in El Paso. Building on the findings of the December assessment visit to El Paso-Ciudad Juarez, the week-long event will be a key opportunity for us to develop with Mexico the kind of strategy it needs to re-establish control of Juarez's streets.
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